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Scottish Bird News

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC

No 87 Mar. 2008

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RSPB Inversnaid, past present and future

Garrison Farm and the reserve beyond *Jimmy Maxwell*

RSPB Inversnaid reserve lies in the heart of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, on the east bank of Loch Lomond. Rising steeply from the loch shore, the reserve has a suite of habitats, which include Atlantic Oak woodland and open ground, and climbs to nearly 900m above sea level. Inversnaid is a popular place for birders to see the classic species of oak woods like Pied Flycatcher, Redstart and Wood Warbler, though there is much more of interest at the site than just these species.

Originally purchased in 1986, the reserve covered about half its current extent of 817ha. In 2003, it was extended by the purchase of the Garrison Estate and although several birds of conservation concern occur and breed on the reserve, it is the Black Grouse population which is driving most of the management effort at present. Historically, habitat management on the reserve was aimed at trying to get natural regeneration to occur in the existing oak woodland, but, as we shall see, the vision has extended far beyond the wood's current edge.

An historic overview

Before the Clearances, the woodland is known to have provided a number of important products for the people living around Inversnaid. Coppicing and felling oak to produce tannin from the bark was undertaken throughout Loch Lomondside and while less common, there are the remains of slagheaps or 'bloomeries', which indicate that timber (probably alder) was being converted to charcoal to facilitate the production of iron. Additionally, the woodland would have provided shelter for over-wintering stock (outside of areas used for coppice and charcoal), as well as building and fencing materials and fuel. In all, the woodland formed an essential element of life helping to provide food, income, shelter and heat.

The area certainly suffered depopulation during the period of the Clearances. There are many ruins throughout the lower areas of the reserve showing many people were living there at one time. Additionally, the Garrison was established after the Jacobite Rebellion to provide the English with a stronghold in the heart of Rob Roy

Blackcock display *David Palmar, Photoscot.co.uk*

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Green Hairstreak *J.M.*

country. This was commanded by Wolfe of Quebec fame, for a while, although it didn't last too long, as it is believed Rob Roy's son was responsible for taking much of the building down. All that remains are some ruined walls to a height of about 15' lying next to the RSPB car park and covering an area that is much smaller than the original garrison would have covered.

The woodland wildlife today

A spring walk in the woodland is enough to make you glad to be alive. Carpets of bluebells stretch up the hillside while other woodland flowers provide a colourful backdrop to the freshly emerging leaves. The woods come alive with the arrival of summer migrants, Pied Flycatchers are present in good numbers (20 plus males) as are Redstarts (25pr), Tree pipits, Wood and Garden Warblers as well as the resident Great Spotted Woodpecker, Song Thrush, Blue and Great Tit. Scarcer breeding birds include Bullfinch, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll.

In addition to the avian assemblage, the biodiversity value of the woodland is very high with butterflies including Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Green and Purple Hairstreak and also Golden-ringed Dragonfly. The fern communities are exceptional, with the very scarce Wilson's and Tunbridge filmy fern on occasional boulders, Oak and Beech fern, as well as more common Hard and Lemon-scented ferns occurring throughout the woods. Mammals include Badger, Otter and Pine Martin, although interestingly, neither Red nor Grey Squirrel occur. Bats include Long-eared and Pipistrelle.

Open ground at Garrison

The hillground at Garrison rises up to the craggy ramparts of Ben A'Choin in the north east of the reserve, the lower part being managed as in-by with a combination of highland cattle and sheep.

This management aims to provide suitable conditions for the Black Grouse lek and other in-by birds including Snipe, Wheatear and wintering Twite. Walking up the main track into the heart of the Snaid valley, you pass through a gate and on to the hill ground. This is currently ungrazed and recovering from the attentions of around 1000 head of sheep which grazed the estate for many years. The ground was described as a 'bowling green' when the sheep were removed shortly after purchase in 2003, but is now becoming a fascinating mosaic of recovering vegetation communities including heather, blaeberry, as well as mire communities which are well populated with cotton grass. All these species are important in the diet of Black Grouse and so it is pleasing to see them making a recovery. Some areas are now showing large stands of bog asphodel, and heath spotted orchid is common throughout.

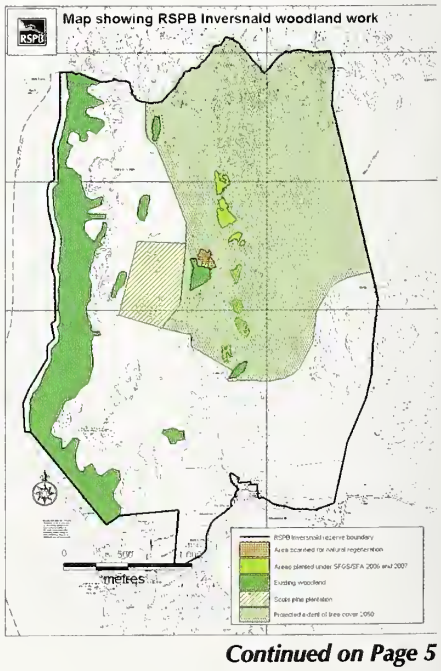
The Garrison area is characterised by the Black Grouse. Three leks occur in the immediate area of the reserve, and all or some of these may be used during any year. After a period of decline, the low point came in 2001-02 when only 2 lekking males were recorded. As expected, recovery since then has been slow but evident, with a rise to 4 in 2005. The increase mirrors the success of leks in the immediate vicinity around Loch Arklet with the numbers of lekking males rising dramatically, from 9 (2005) to 29 (2006). This is probably attributable to the large scale removal of sheep from the whole of the Loch Katrine/Aklet catchments and the resultant recovery in vegetation.

View from the reserve entrance *J.M.*

Hillside resident *J.M.*

Other birds of note include 2-3 prs of Twite breeding annually, as well as small numbers of waders – Curlew and Oystercatcher, with higher numbers of Snipe. Red Grouse were recorded for the first time in 2006, and Stonechats and Wheatears breed in the remains of the stone dykes. The area is important for Golden Eagle, with 2 pairs using the area - sightings are always possible, especially on a good day following a few days of poor weather. Buzzard is the commonest raptor, with 3 pairs breeding, while Merlin is also suspected to have bred over the last couple of years. Occasional records of Hen Harrier passing through during the winter indicate, along with the recovering beds of heather, that this species is a potential breeder of the future. A recent highlight and first for the reserve was White-tailed Eagle, and this too could become a more regular occurrence with the expansion of the population to the west and establishment of a new population on the east coast. Ospreys are regular through the summer on Loch Lomond.

Expanding the woodland The reserve management was originally aimed at encouraging natural regeneration within existing woodland, but the acquisition of Garrison has allowed the vision for the reserve to become more about restoring



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No 87 Mar. 2008

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 9th May 2008 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Ayrshire,** Miss G Brogan & Mr C Smith, Ms M Overend, **Borders,** Mrs F Clift, Mr B Dixon & Mrs J Dixon, Mr Paul Goode, Mrs C Mackie, Mr R McQuade, Mr C J Moult, **Central Scotland,** Mr S Dewar, **Clyde,** Mr A Carroll, Mr R Gray, Mr P Michael Hodgson, Mr D Menzies, Mr C Payne, Mr D Wilson, **Dumfries,** Miss M E Gemmill, Miss M Gemmill, Mr & Mrs R Thompson, **England, Wales & NI,** Mr A C Birchenough, Mr D J Maxted, Mr D Shackleton, Mr A Young, **Grampian,** Prof & Mrs I Goodbody, Mr M Lewis, Mr J Millar, **Highland,** Mr J A Fulton, Ms E Kennedy, **Lothian,** Mrs R Briggs, Mr G Cairns, Mr & Mrs J Carson, J Driessen, Mr C Geddes, John Harrison, Mr A Hepburn, Mrs W Keeves, Mr & Mrs F Last, Mr & Mrs A Lawson, Mr J MacLean, Prof & Mrs P Maitland, Ms J Maxwell, Mr J McCabe, Maureen McWatt, Mr B Rarity, Mr M Russell MSP, Mr S M Strachan, Miss J J Thomson & Mr W Barber, Mr R E L Watt, James and Barbara Wood, **Orkney,** Mr M Russell, **Stewartry,** Mr E A M MacAlpine, **Tayside,** Mr J Ogilvie, Isabel Smith, Ingeborg van Leeuwen, **West Galloway,** Mr & Mrs W Walker.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **December: 1st** £30 W.G.Paterson, **2nd** £20 Mrs. G.Hartland, **3rd** £10 Miss S.Hunter. **January: 1st** £30 Mrs. M.Draper, **2nd** £20 J.N.Schofield, **3rd** £10 Mrs. S.Craig. **February: 1st** £30 Miss W.E.Dickson, **2nd** £20 Mrs M.S.Ablett, **3rd** £10 Mrs. M.Lennox.

New members are always welcome. They must be over 18 and Club members. Please contact – Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Thanks from Janet Crummy

I would like to say a heart felt thank you to all those who supported me through good times and bad times during my presidency. Over the two years we had some really low points and then some really good ones like the conclusion of *BS3*. It was quite strenuous at times and now I am personally thanking all the volunteers, at Waterston House and on all our committees all over Scotland, and especially Dave, Jean, Kate then Wendy, for their support and continued commitment to the SOC. I am very pleased to leave the club with Chris Waltho's safe hands on the helm and wish him all the best for the next two years.

CBE for Conservationist

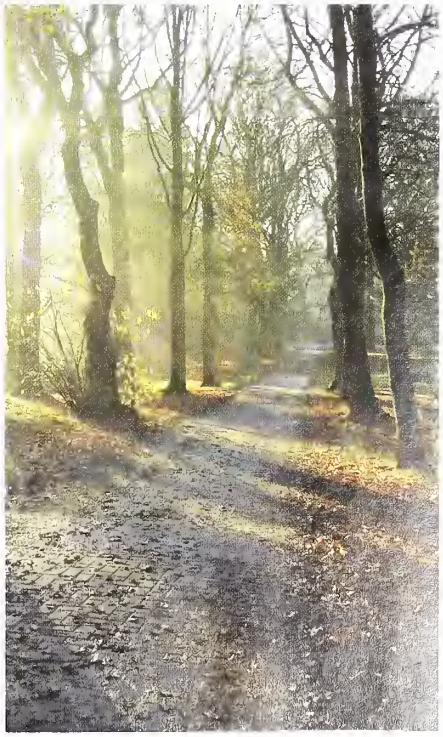
We were delighted to notice that Jeremy Greenwood, SOC member and recently–retired Director of the BTO has been awarded a CBE for his services to conservation in the New Year's Honours list. Jeremy has had many associations with the SOC over the years and this deserved award will be well received by the membership.

(we wrongly described an award in *SBN*86 - apologies are due to Alistair Lavery who of course was awarded OBE)

Dalzell Woods location

A reference was made in the *SBN* 85 note "Nuthatches in Clyde" to the location of Dalzell Woods, Motherwell. As we have had enquiries as to where exactly this is, the following may be helpful. Dalzell is park area of woodland walks belonging to North Lanarkshire Council. It lies directly north of Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve to which it is connected by pathways. This means that a day spent around the varied water areas of the Reserve may be finished off by walking up into the woodland and enjoying the rich birdlife there which of course includes the breeding Nuthatches.

Dalzell is now managed in conjunction with Baron's Haugh but can by accessed by road separately. Airbles Road which starts opposite Strathclyde Country Park entrance, is followed to an eventual t-junction. Turn right, then right again at Taggart's Garage, and left directly. This road leads down into the parkland and some parking bays.



Autumn in Dalzell *Jimmy Maxwell*

Press Release

Europe's largest - ever photography project has launched its web site at www.wild-wonders.com Wild Wonders of Europe is an epic, pan-European initiative, aiming to reveal to 700 million Europeans our shared natural heritage and to inspire a desire to safeguard its future. This is also the start of the countdown to the Great Quest, which will begin in May 2008. In this, 50 of Europe's leading nature photographers will travel on more than 90 assignments to every country in Europe, with a mission to create stunning imagery among Europe's natural treasures. Wild Wonders of Europe will span at least 5 years, consisting of a cutting-edge web site, outdoor exhibitions, books, audiovisual picture shows, TV-series, photo competitions, and events all across Europe.

"Most of us Europeans today know more about nature in Africa or North America, than we know about Europe. How many Swedes know anything about nature in Bulgaria? How many Irish know anything about nature in Belarus? Or vice versa! This is all part of a natural heritage that we share. But how are you supposed to care about something that you have never even seen or heard about?" says Staffan Widstrand, photographer and writer from Sweden, Managing Director of Wild Wonders of Europe.

"Many think they need to go to America or Australia to experience fascinating wildlife and amazing natural landscapes, but there is lots of it in Europe. We have bison, bears, and wolves, as well as deep canyons, high mountains, rolling steppes, great rivers and turquoise fjords! We would like to inspire Europeans to go out there and better enjoy their own natural heritage, first-hand. But beware, you might fall in love with it all!" says Florian Möllers, photographer and writer from Germany, the project's Communications Director.

"It is clear that presently, a majority of Europeans are becoming increasingly alienated from nature. Wild Wonders of Europe aims to reverse this trend. We want to touch people's emotions, excite them about nature, make it cool. We want to re-connect people with our natural heritage...our spiritual home," says Peter Cairns, photographer and writer from Britain, Business Director of Wild Wonders of Europe.

Wild Wonders of Europe is being made possible through a growing partnership with several major international conservation, media and public organisations along with socially and environmentally conscious corporations. Among them are National Geographic Magazine, Epson, Bayard Presse, PolarQuest, Noble Caledonia, European Environment Agency, Conservation International, ILCP (The International League of Conservation Photographers), UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme, The WILD Foundation, and IUCN (The World Conservation Union), Countdown 2010, AEFONA (Association of Spanish Nature Photographers).

Revealing Europe's amazing natural treasures to the world. A heritage to share - to enjoy - to protect.

www.wild-wonders.com

Antarctica Jan.-Feb. 2008

The Vavilov offshore and old whaler - a link with the past *Michael Thomas*

Clyde SOC member Michael Thomas has been invited by the SOC to give winter lectures on his recent travels to the far south. This note is merely a taster.

ANTARCTICA

Imagine a place as big as the United States and Europe combined.

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It is Antarctica, the strange and beautiful continent at the bottom of the earth.

Joseph M. Dukert. (This is Antarctica.)

It is the bottom of the earth, but when you get there, it must be the most beautiful place on earth. Never having given the idea of going there any serious thought, when my son Huw called from Buenos Aires in November and proposed that he take me to Antarctica, what could I say? Simply an offer I could not refuse!

You have to work at it! New York to Buenos Aires is a ten hour flight, then to Ushuaia, the most southerly city in the world, another three hour flight. Two days across the Drake Passage in a Force 9 westerly [same on the return!]. Then, an ice, snow, glacier, and iceberg ridden Paradise. Three species of Whale, four species of Seal, and a nice list of new life birds. Albatross [Wandering, Royal, Black-browed], Petrels [Giant, Wilson's Storm, Blue, Cape Petrels, Sooty Shearwater and Antarctic Fulmar] and Skuas [Antarctic, South Polar] around the good ship VAVILOV [registered Kaliningrad, Captain Viktor Lysok], and then visits to Gentoo [30.000 pairs] Adele and Chinstrap Penguin colonies. The penguins still have no fear of man. For how long I wonder? For how long will it last? At least I have seen it, and the weather was remarkably good to us, allowing the thousand or so images that my son and I took. But you have to have been there to understand the experience... Robert Cushman Murphy, the famous American ornithologist, said: "I now belong to a higher cult of mortals, for I have seen the Albatross..."

Michael Thomas

The Glasgow Naturalist

The Glasgow Naturalist is a peer reviewed journal first issued in 1908 that publishes original studies in botany, zoology and geology in Scotland. Full papers and short notes are welcome from members and non members of the Society. Further details can be found at: http://www.gnhs.org.uk/publications.html

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Birds and People: A Major Website and Book Project

A highly acclaimed team that includes Mark Cocker (author), David Tipling (photographer), and Jonathan Elphick (researcher) is launching a major new project entitled *Birds and People*. This is also a ground-breaking joint venture between BirdLife International and Random House.

Birds and People is being launched as a website forum where anyone interested in birds and their cultural importance can discuss and place on record their experiences and observations. Many of the contributions will be used in the text of an eventual book and all contributors will be acknowledged. If you are passionate about birds and wish to get involved then visit our website www.birdsandpeople.org for more detailed information. Or email us at markcocker@randomhouse.co.uk or write to: Birds and People, Jonathan Cape, Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 2SA UK.

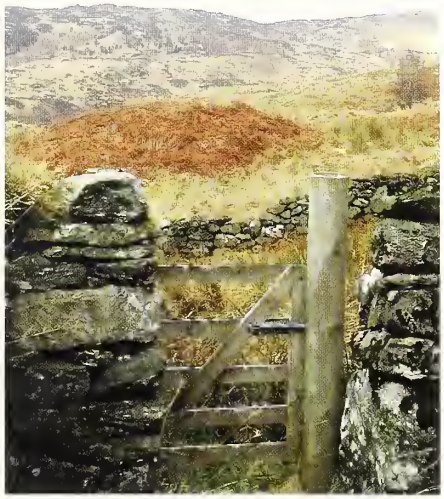
RSPB Inversnaid - continued from Page 2

woodland and scrub in the upland area. The principles of management remain the same however, with the effective management of grazing animals core to success. Red and Roe Deer are present, and Feral Goats are also found. Both deer and goats and their populations are managed through carefully composed management plans .There is a constant need to monitor numbers to inform management.

The goats are particularly damaging. Not only are young saplings browsed hard, they will climb leaning and fallen trees to get at more tender shoots. Bark-stripping is also an issue. As with the deer, the goat population is carefully managed to reduce grazing pressure through a selective cull. Their complete loss would reduce grazing within the woods too far and affect woodland passerines like Pied Flycatcher.

The first project to expand woodland cover was aimed at establishing a 24ha area of Scots pine. The area is deer-fenced and heavily marked with chestnut palings to prevent Black Grouse strikes. This fence is being maintained for the next few years to allow the trees to reach a reasonable height and thereafter will be removed. The most interesting thing about this area is that along with the planted Scots Pine of local provenance, there is a huge tree seed bank surviving in the soil. Rowan and alder in particular have regenerated naturally in large numbers within the protection of the fence. The young trees that have developed are already attracting Tree Pipit and chats. This all bodes well for the next phase of tree establishment and for the survival of woodland into the future.

The current woodland expansion is one element of a much larger project in partnership with FCS and the Woodland Trust under the sponsorship of the Scottish Forest Alliance, and is on a truly landscape scale. The area from Inversnaid in the west through to Glen Finglas in the east is under the management of the three organisations. The vision is for a complex of broadleaved woodland and associated open ground habitats, under management for biodiversity, access and enjoyment, extending to an area of some 14000ha+, of which up to 9000ha may become woodland in time. This will be one of the largest woodland restoration projects in Europe.



View to upper valley from sheep fank *J.M.*

Bluebells view of the Loch *RSPB*

Specifically, the work at Garrison is aimed at encouraging natural regeneration for Black Grouse on the open hill ground to the north of the Garrison Estate. Eight blocks of around 1ha each have been planted on the lower slopes with a mixture of oak, ash, alder, hazel, rowan and holly. Some Scots pine have been planted too. These trees have all been grown from local provenance seed and are intended to provide a seed source to spread tree and scrub cover across the hillside in a natural pattern. Tree communities will develop, with alder in the wetter areas, oak on the drier patches and, as the elevation increases, so the communities will change to low growing willows and similar montane scrub. Black Grouse will benefit as will scrub species such as Whinchat and Stonechat and the raptors that prey on them, like Merlin.

There are now two trails that can be walked at any time. The original nature trail leads to and from the West Highland Way and is accessed to the north of the Inversnaid Hotel. This trail takes you along the loch shore from the hotel car park and up through the woodland to a view point. All of the typical birds of the wood can be seen along this trail, particularly Pied Flycatcher and Tree Pipit. The West Highland Way can be followed through the reserve for about 2.5 miles towards the head of the loch and as you go north it gets better for Redstart and Wood Warbler. A second trail has recently been established from the new car park at Garrison Farm (signposted from the road). This leads up through the in-by fields to a restored sheepfank and from there the open hill can be accessed. A full day allows exploration of the variety of habitats and wildlife, and although spring is the best time for many of the bird species, a visit at any time of year can provide a memorable experience. The reserve is accessed by following the unclassed road from Aberfoyle for the 15 miles to Inversnaid. Take care, as flooding, ice, snow and oncoming traffic around blind corners are always a risk. The nearest public transport drop-off is at Aberfoyle. Refreshments are available at the Inversnaid Hotel, and there are also toilets located there.

Nick Chambers
RSPB Central Scotland Reserves Site Manager

Alan Lauder
RSPB South and West Scotland Regional Reserves Manager

SOC bird records uploaded to the National Biodiversity Network Gateway

www.searchnbn.net

Tree Pipit *Linda Baillie*

In my article in *SBN* 85 (Sept. 2007), I gave some background notes on the SOC's project to submit bird records to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and how to access these data using the NBN Gateway website (www.searchnbn.net). In this article, I will focus on the bird datasets that SOC has recently uploaded to the website.

How to call up a distribution map on the Gateway

In brief, to see a distribution map of any species simply type in that species' name in the Searchbox, then select Option 3, Interactive distribution map, and hey presto, up comes an atlas-type map of that species' distribution in the UK. When viewing the map bear in mind the fact that it is based only on those datasets that have been submitted to the NBN. Using your mouse you can then draw a square around an area of interest to you, and zoom in on the map. As you zoom in, the scale of the background OS map also increases, to a final resolution of 1:50,000, which greatly increases the usefulness of the atlas maps that you are looking at, and usually leads you in to exploring the maps further!

Over 150,000 bird records – free to view!

To date, relatively few bird datasets have been submitted to the NBN Gateway, but here in Scotland, we are beginning to make our mark! The SOC has just loaded its first datasets onto the Gateway, and these can now be viewed 'live' on the NBN Gateway website. The datasets comprise Highland Bird Records 2002 (5,775 records) and 2003 (7,857 records), the South-east Scotland Tetrad Atlas 1988-94 (70,917 records) and the Clyde Tetrad Atlas 1985-91 (46,131 records). In addition, the Argyll Bird Club also has its records for 2002-03 (28,000 records) on the Gateway. So now you can view a grand total of over 150,000 bird records for over 150 species at the click of your mouse! The RSPB have also been active in adding their datasets to the Gateway, and many of these are relevant to Scotland e.g. Corn Crake, Ring Ouzel, Red Kite, White-tailed Eagle and Black Grouse.

My sincere thanks go to the large number of folk who helped in the preparation of SOC datasets for their areas – in particular Ian Andrews, Cliff Baister, Dave Butterfield, Iain Gibson, Mark Holling and Al McNee. Thanks are also due to SNH for funding this project. A brief description of the SOC datasets is given below:

Ring Ouzel *John Busby*

Highland Bird Records

These records come from all the observers who submitted bird records to the local recorder Al McNee for 2002 and 2003. Hence there is a wide variety of species and record types. To make the data set more meaningful when mapped, it was divided into breeding records and non-breeding records so that these can be looked at separately. In addition, sensitive species are placed in a separate dataset that can only be viewed at 10 km resolution (or not at all for the most sensitive species.

The South-east Scotland and Clyde tetrad atlases

The South-east Scotland tetrad dataset (for the Lothian and Borders recording areas) is already available of course in *The Breeding Birds of South-east Scotland - A Tetrad Atlas* (Murray *et al.* 1998). For those of us who don't own a copy of the book (which is still available on special offer via the SOC web-site at http://www.thesoc.myzen.co.uk/index.htm), this is a chance to view these records in detail, with the additional benefit of background OS maps and 'zoom in' capability.

On the other hand, the Clyde tetrad atlas has not been previously published – so the NBN Gateway provides the first chance for the public to see the results of this survey. This is a good example of how the NBN Gateway can 'mobilise' data that might otherwise be hard to access.

The tetrad atlas datasets make for particularly impressive viewing. For the first time it's possible to look at bird distributions at a 2x2 km scale east-west across Scotland from St Abbs to Loch Lomond, covering an impressive total of 2,981 tetrads (area 11,924 km2). As someone who is not particularly familiar with this part of Scotland, I found looking at the tetrad scale maps fascinating, giving me a new perspective on the species in these areas, and raising lots of questions. For those who know the areas, can you answer the following questions: Which one of the four summer visitors to woodlands – Tree Pipit, Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler would you say is the most widely distributed? Are Herons commoner in the watersheds of the Tweed or the Clyde? Is the Green Woodpecker commoner in the east or west?

And for the rest of us, some observations that I found interesting (including answers to the above questions): The highest concentration of Grasshopper Warbler tetrads lies to the east of Glasgow between Cumbernauld and Motherwell. This has also been the main area for Willow Tits. Sand Martins are (or

were) surprisingly sparsely distributed across the two areas, except for impressive concentrations along the Lanarkshire river valleys.

The only significant concentration of breeding Teal in the whole area is at the headwaters of the River Clyde. This area was also a hotspot for breeding Common Gull and Black-headed Gull and also supported both sawbills. Loch Lomondside is THE hot spot for Redstart, Wood Warbler, Tree Pipit and to some extent Pied Flycatcher. Of these, the Redstart was the most widely distributed across the Clyde and SE Scotland.

As well as supporting breeding Shelducks (which surprised me!), Loch Lomond is one of only two areas (the other being the headwaters of the Clyde) where there is significant overlap between breeding Goosanders and Red-breasted Mergansers. Goosanders are widespread in SE Scotland, but Mergansers are much rarer here.

I was intrigued by the virtual absence of Great Spotted Woodpeckers from large parts of Lanarkshire (with no occupied tetrads at all in three 10 km squares at Forth, Symington and Newbigging). All these squares support considerable areas of forestry plantations, but clearly these did not provide sufficient breeding habitat to support Great Spots. Perhaps the Forestry Authority's policy of leaving deadwood during timber felling operations will result in these areas being occupied by the time of the next atlas. Green Woodpeckers were commoner in the east, whilst Grey Herons were commoner in the west.

During the survey periods (85-91 in Clyde, 88-94 in SE Scotland) Lapwing, Curlew, Snipe and Redshank were widespread in both areas, with almost blanket presence of the first two. Will this be the case in the New Atlas? In a similar vein, 71 tetrads in SE Scotland and Clyde held breeding Yellow Wagtails – I wonder what number will be found in the New Atlas?

Tree Pipit distribution as seen on the NBN Gateway - Clyde and SE Scotland tetrad atlas data. LEGEND - Black lines show Vice-county boundaries (only those in Clyde, Lothian and Borders were surveyed).

Tree Pipit distribution

Picking a species out of the hat I chose to look at the distribution of the Tree Pipit at tetrad scale. I was surprised at how thinly distributed the species is in the Lothians and much of the Borders, and impressed by the concentration of birds around Loch Lomond which also extends surprisingly far south-eastwards to the northern edge of Glasgow, with another concentration around Cumbernauld. By contrast, there are only a few concentrations in the Borders, mostly focussed on planted conifer forests such as Craik Forest, Wauchope Forest and the plantations of the upper Tweed. Presumably the birds here are using recently planted or restocked areas. At the 10 km scale, these differences in distribution are not discernable.

The future

I hope that these brief dips into the bird distribution data will whet your appetite for more explorations of your own, but more importantly, I hope they show the particular value of participating in atlas surveys. In many ways, the completion of a tetrad atlas by a recording area must be one of its crowning glories, and Lothian, Borders, Clyde, Ayrshire, Fife and Grampian should be duly congratulated on their achievements. Hopefully the NBN Gateway will make a big contribution to bringing these achievements to a wider audience. The good news is that SE Scotland and Clyde are planning to repeat their tetrad surveys as part of the BTO/SOC/IWC national new atlas, and others are thinking of following suit! In the mean time, I will be continuing to upload general bird record datasets such as those for the Highlands onto the Gateway.

I would much appreciate any comments that you have as an SOC member on any aspect of bird recording and the NBN.

Clive McKay, Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator clive.mckay@the-soc.org.uk

TIPS ON USING THE NBN GATEWAY

- Use the increase map size option on the 'View Controls' tab to increase the size of the map on your screen. I usually click on this twice to get a full screen sized image on my laptop.
- To remove the grey 10 km squares from view, uncheck the 10km box on the Resolution tab.
- To select only the tetrad survey results from Clyde and SE Scotland:
  - scroll down to the bottom of the map page below the list of datasets available for use
  - Click the yellow deselect datasets button (note that the ticks disappear form beside all the datasets, indicating that they are no longer viewable)
  - Then click the boxes beside the Clyde and SE Scotland datasets
  - Complete the operation by clicking the refresh button.
  - A map will now appear based only on the tetrad atlas data

You can display Vice-county boundaries (which correspond roughly with the Clyde, Lothian and Borders recording areas) to give rough outlines of the limits of the survey areas (useful for rarer species with fewer dots on the map) - select Vice-county on the Boundary tab, and click the Refresh button.

If you want to look for habitat relationships click the Land Cover Map 2000 box on the Background tab. To show the legend for the habitats displayed click on Show legend on the Guidance tab.

Yellow Wagtail *Stewart Love*

Crossbow victim *Gay Hastie*

Hessilhead is Scotland's biggest and busiest wildlife rescue centre. It occupies 20 acres of mixed habitat in North Ayrshire, including woodland, marsh and open water. There are more than 70 aviaries, enclosures and release pens. In addition to the main hospital (used mostly for intensive care and hand-rearing), there is a swan/seal unit with heated pens and an indoor pool, a surgery with x-ray and operating facilities, an outdoor seal pool, wildfowl enclosures and a hedgehog hospital. The woodland is rarely disturbed, a haven for deer, badgers and many birds adapting to the wild; the 3 acre quarry pond provides a halfway house for wildfowl. Five experienced staff and a team of volunteers care for more than 3000 casualties a year.

Last year's patients included 155 Blackbirds, 18 Song Thrushes, 52 Dunnocks, 85 owls, 25 buzzards, 160 swans, 36 roe deer, 503 hedgehogs and we reared over 200 Mallard ducklings. The problems that these casualties have are as diverse as the species themselves and they are susceptible to many diseases. Accidents result in broken limbs and concussion; feather damage and contamination can be fatal; parasites cause weakness and starvation; fishing tackle is an ever present problem and sometimes, sadly, we treat victims of deliberate poisoning, shooting, snaring and crossbow attacks.

When we first started caring for injured wildlife, in the early 1970s, there were no reference books and few people to ask for advice. So we learnt by trial and error, making many mistakes. Some of our hand-reared youngsters were too tame to release, and we persevered with some casualties that should have been euthanized on arrival. Now there is a network of wildlife rehabilitators across Britain. We meet at symposiums, exchange ideas, learn from radio-tracking of hand-reared orphans and follow a code of practice. Some centres specialize in a particular species, while others like Hessilhead can cope with a wide range of wildlife. We have always been grateful for the advice and support of local ornithologists.

Winter is a relatively quiet time of year, though with 45 hedgehogs, 7 roe deer, 9 grey seal pups, a group of badgers in a rehabilitation enclosure and 3 foxes that we hope to get back to the wild, there is plenty to keep us busy. New casualties arrive every day. These include cat victims that require antibiotic treatment to counteract the pasturella infection that inevitably results from cat bites. Road traffic and collision victims are common.

During an initial examination and assessment, it is possible to decide whether or not the bird is viable. Simple wing and leg fractures can be strapped or pinned, with a good chance of the bird making a full recovery. Birds with multiple or compound fractures will be euthanized, as will birds with serious back injuries. Concussed birds will be treated with anti-inflammatory drugs, and re-assessed a few days later. A female Sparrowhawk that was brought in a few days ago, will be released, like all territorial birds, close to where she was found.

Seabirds, and others that are underweight, are kept on rehydration fluid for 24 hours, as food is likely to kill a starving bird. The rehydration fluid is administered by crop tube, a procedure that shouldn't be undertaken by anyone inexperienced. You would be surprised how many birds arrive at the centre, gurgling and gasping for breath, because with the best of intentions, someone has poured a spoonful of water (or worse, milk) down the bird's throat. If a bird doesn't know that a drink is coming, it won't close its windpipe. The result is that these birds drown, though they may have recovered from their original problem. It is important that sea birds are given access to water; without regular bathing and preening they will loose their waterproofing and their return to the wild will be delayed.

A few cases pose more of a dilemma, like the Buzzard that was reported to us last week. When we entered the wood to find it, the bird dropped down from a branch about 15' high to run around on the ground and was caught quite easily. The bird was a good weight and had a crop full of food, probably worms. It doesn't have

Sparrowhawk on barbed wire *Gay Hastie*

Fishing hooks removal *Gay Hastie*

Removing fishing line *Gay Hastie*

Blind - but recovered *Gay Hastie*

Cuckoo being released *Gay Hastie*

Ready for release *Gay Hastie*

Baby Hedgehog *Gay Hastie*

an injured wing as had been thought, but has poor feathers. This is a problem stemming from poor feeding while in the nest. The feathers have fret marks or hunger traces, lines of weakness where the feathers may snap. If enough feathers break, the bird becomes flightless. Although this Buzzard was in good bodily condition when found, and had been eating, it doesn't meet the criteria for release, ie, does the bird have a good chance of surviving in the wild? The options are to keep the bird till it moults in late summer, or we euthanize it now. Keeping a bird in captivity for several months is rarely a favoured option as even if kept in a large aviary, the bird will not be fit when it is time for release. Yet this young bird has survived most of the winter, despite poor feathers! Many young raptors don't survive this long, even without feather problems. Does this Buzzard deserve another chance in the wild?

It is generally true that the sooner a patient can return to the wild, the better its chances of survival. Long term isn't considered a good option, particularly for migrant birds. Whooper Swan 7HH was an exception. He came, quite badly injured, in April, and wasn't fit to return to Iceland that spring. When his family returned to Caerlaverock in October, we released 7HH there too. It was really good news to hear that he was back at Caerlaverock the following autumn. His summer in the wrong country hadn't caused him any problems.

Every week of the winter brings Mute Swan casualties. Recent arrivals include a swan that was crushed by the ramp of the Renfrew Ferry (ironically named the 'Yoker Swan'). Another swan that had been regularly crossing a busy road ran out of luck and sustained a wing injury in collision with a van; a cygnet crash-landed on a snowy road, damaging toes on both feet. There were the inevitable fishing tackle victims, an oiled swan from Kilbirnie Loch and the swan that sustained a terrible open wound when colliding with a picket fence.

It is always good news when we hear that some of 'our casualties' have been seen doing well. In 1999 we reared 296 Lesser Black-backed Gulls that were rescued from the piles of rubble and debris when the old Linwood car factory was demolished during the breeding season. There were dissenting voices, claiming we were wasting our time and money, as these birds wouldn't survive after release. Every year we hear of field sightings of some of these gulls in Portugal, proving that the ton of tinned cat food they ate each week was not wasted.

May, June and July are our busiest months, with hundreds of young birds being hand-reared. This is a major undertaking, with nestlings requiring food every half hour. Fledglings are fed less often, so they learn to feed themselves. Once the youngsters are feeding confidently, they are moved to aviaries, where they can forage for food, exercise and are away from people. Most of the hand-reared youngsters are given a soft release, either at Hessilhead or at one of our other release sites. A soft release involves opening a hatch in the aviary and leaving food as usual. Most birds return for food for a few days, sometimes longer, but eventually they become independent.

Occasionally an individual bird will hang around the centre, more confiding than wild counterparts. For the last 2 years a hand-reared robin, easily recognized by his deformed foot, has made regular visits to the food preparation room, where he helps himself to titbits. One species, more than any other, tends to stay around the centre after release. This is surprising, as the Grey Heron is nervous in captivity. Herons rarely feed themselves for the first few days in care, so have to be force fed. If they are disturbed within a few hours of a meal, up comes dinner. Regurgitating food is a useful trick in the wild, aiding a quick getaway. It is not so useful if you are trying to save a heron from starvation!

We are looking forward to another busy year at Hessilhead. The hospital is currently being refurbished, and this will be completed before our busy season starts in spring. No doubt there will be many casualties, perhaps new species and certainly new problems. We will be involved in the Uist Hedgehog Rescue. This involves setting up and staffing a centre on Benbecula, transporting the hedgehogs to Hessilhead, monitoring them till they attain a weight of 600gm, then finding them suitable release sites. Last year we translocated 244 Uist Hedgehogs to the mainland. Our Open Day will be held on 8th June, when guided tours will give visitors the chance to see the work that goes on at the centre. We will be running a series of training days on First Aid for Injured Wildlife. These are popular with vet nurses and students, Countryside Rangers and Wildlife Crime Officers. Volunteers help with feeding and cleaning, building and maintenance, driving casualties to the centre or by offering release sites. If you find a wildlife casualty call us on 01505 502415, and for more information visit our web site www.hessilhead.org.uk

Gay Hastie

Begging Song Thrush chick *Gay Hastie*

Responses to Blackcock article

Daldhu lek *Iain MacKenzie*

In SBN 86, John Savory wrote about Blackcocks sparring through fences at lekking time – here are some members' responses concerning this behaviour.

My colleagues and I (Countryside Rangers with the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority) have surveyed a number of leks on the east side Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. One in the Trossachs actually has a 'T' junction of fences with field gates at the 'T' crossing it. When I first surveyed the lek there were only two Blackcock males present and they sparred more or less as you described in your article. On one occasion when there were four males and one female (she was atop one of the field gate posts!), there were three males displaying through separate sections of the fence (at the 'T') with the remaining male on the periphery of the action.

Adam Samson

If topography is fairly uniform without landmarks, there is good evidence from experiments that trout and cichlid fish use artificial landmarks as territorial stations, and take smaller territories when more landmarks are added. Red Grouse and Ptarmigan often use variations in topography as territorial boundaries. Also, on a fairly uniform heathery hillside at Kerloch in Deeside, where wooden poles carried power-lines across the moor, the nearby territorial cock Red Grouse tended to meet one another at the poles or under the power-lines.

Adam Watson

For a few years I've been watching a Black Grouse lek which is within a couple of small (<1 ha) paddocks on very short grass, at Daldhu, Gleann Fearnach, Perthshire, at an altitude of 370m. There is a fence (rylock and stock height) running through the middle where the cocks gather, mostly on the east side where an apparently dominant cock has always been present. On two occasions, in April(05 and 06), three on that side faced another through the fence. I've also seen birds on either side of the fence squaring up to each other in normal lekking behaviour but of course with no contact made(see photo). It's an old traditional site quite hard-grazed by sheep and red deer and I'm not sure how old the fence is. The surrounding landscape is a grass-heather mix with a couple of mature conifer shelter-belts nearby. The lek has been dwindling in size with ten cocks counted in 1994 but only one in 2007.

Iain MacKenzie

In 1987, we watched a Blackcock lek at Killiecrankie RSPB Reserve on 18 mornings between 12 April and 2 May, to monitor female activity. Four males were regularly present at the lek site, old farmland now permanent pasture at 280 metres a.s.l., which was bisected by a fence. Two of the males held territory on the left side and two on the right. The most dominant male, A, the only one seen to mate, was on the left, nearer to the fence than B. C and D were on the right, but C was usually nearer the fence than D, who seemed to be the lowest-ranking of the four. A great amount of aggression occurred through the fence between A and C. These bouts of aggression would move up and down the fence with both birds remaining on their own sides. Bird C once crossed over into A's territory eight minutes after A had finished and left. He displayed there for a few minutes before leaving himself.

On one occasion two females arrived, ten minutes apart, and walked into C's territory. Amidst all the turmoil that this created they moved up and down the fence trying to get through it to A's territory, but this was made more difficult by C's attentions. Eventually they both succeeded in crossing the fence, where one mated with A.

Whether or not there was any intent in siting their lek around a fence, the effect of it was certainly that the two birds, A and C, were kept apart and avoided injury. The fence clearly formed a hard boundary between their territories. Unfortunately the lek had declined to a single bird by 1998 and disappeared the next year.

Martin Robinson

I have many records of Black Grouse(BK) lekking through fences. I can think of five leks in central Scotland where I have observed this behaviour and on more than one occasion when visiting the same lek site. This practice has continued throughout the lekking year and also annually after that till the lek grew or failed completely. Even when the lek has grown, a single male has continued to lek behind the fence. Of the leks I have observed with fencing, two have been deer fences whilst the remainder have been stock fences.

At Inversnaid, when the lek rose from two to three, the alpha male continued to lek with the beta male through the stock fence with the new arrival behind the alpha male. However later in the lek period, the beta male would then come over the fence to lek with the other two. Later in that season, the beta male always started his lekking from the other side of the fence (warm up routine!) before joining the other two. In contrast, at a similar lek of three, the beta male always stayed behind the fence, in this instance it was a deer fence. The size of leks featuring this behaviour has varied from two males to ten.

Of real interest was the instance of a Racklehahn (Capercaillie X Black Grouse hybrid male) lekking through the wire to the beta male at Glen Finglas in 2002, when there were ten Black Grouse and the Racklehahn. The beta male was the only other male remaining close to the Racklehahn due to the fact that the hybrid had just literally bowled the alpha male and others off the lek site. Indeed at the Glen Finglas lek site they were lekking through the fence for about four years before the hill fire destroyed the habitat.

On only one occasion have I seen two Black Grouse, beta and one other, facing the alpha male and the main group, and in this instance, it was back to beta alone on the next day. When only two are involved, they very rarely fly over the fence to have a real go at each other. As a matter of interest, I now follow/observe fence lines when looking for new leks, as through-fence lekking appears to me to be normal practice.

Duncan Cameron

Mike Russell and the Editors *David Palmar, photoscot.co.uk*

The Birds of Scotland - Best Bird Book of the Year (*Birdwatch*)

Since '*The Birds of Scotland*' appeared at the end of 2007, congratulations and accolades have been flowing in, among them the one above from the magazine 'Birdwatch'.

A special motion, supported by many MSPs, has been passed by the Scottish Parliament, welcoming the publication, praising the SOC and commending the work of all concerned. The official launch of the volumes in the Bird Hall of the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh on 9th January was attended by Mike Russell MSP, Minister for Environment, who addressed an audience composed of supporters of the publication, those involved in its creation and many SOC members.

Guests chatting beforehand *David Palmar, photoscot.co.uk*

Artists Chris Rose, Tommy Daniels and John Busby *David Palmar, photoscot.co.uk*

If you would like to invest in a copy of this historic publication, the following options are available –

Buy a copy: *BS3* is now available 'over the counter' at Waterston House, Aberlady (this way more profit accrues to SOC), and from Viking Optics, 101 Rose St. Edinburgh.

Order by Post: See SOC website for Order form, or contact SOC for details.

Order by phone: You can order by phone if you pay by debit/credit card. Call the SOC on 01875 871330; please have your card details ready.

The Volunteer & Farmer Alliance: RSPB's flagship agricultural project continues to impress!

Curlew *Tom Marshall (rspb-images.com)*

The RSPB Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (V&FA) was launched in Scotland in 2002, having taken off south of the border following a pilot in 1999. The V&FA project provides a free breeding bird survey for farmers, carried out by RSPB registered and trained volunteers and is widely available across Scotland, except in Highland region.

The project aims to develop closer links between the RSPB and the farming community, initially through bird surveys and to encourage beneficial wildlife management. There is no commitment for farmers to adopt specific practices on the basis of the farm survey results, but we try to draw attention to how current practices are benefiting the birds found on the survey, and provide guidance on the possible funding options available under agri-environment schemes. Additional contact with farmland advisers, for example from FWAG Scotland and SAC, is invaluable in then taking a potential application forward. We try to match volunteers to nearby farms and also aim to ensure that a farm waits no longer than two years for a survey. The basic format for the V&FA has remained unchanged, and the project continues to go from strength to strength.

The main output from the surveys is a laminated, A3 size colour map that shows the distribution of birds of conservation interest (see *British Birds 95: 410-450, 2002*) are mapped, together with an indication of whether territorial behaviour was noted. This provides an invaluable 'snapshot' for a single breeding season. A survey report accompanies the final map, together with a complete species list, a certificate and a selection of relevant advisory leaflets.

Following the survey, a questionnaire is sent to all new farmers and volunteers to gauge how well the project is viewed, and drawing attention to areas where we can improve things. Thankfully, the project is consistently highly regarded, and the most recent analysis shows that for the UK:

- 98% felt that taking part in the V&FA was worthwhile
- 97% of farmers had found the laminated map useful
- 88% of farmers had put into practice farmland bird management guidelines that accompanied the map
- 70% of farmers are now more likely to be involved with other RSPB initiatives

The volunteer responses are equally encouraging:

- 98% were satisfied with the level of support they received from project staff
- 96% thought the maps that were provided for their fieldwork were suitable
- 94% enjoyed participating in the project, either a great deal or a fair amount
- 88% of volunteers were pleased with the V&FA training that they received

The volunteer help is invaluable and a comprehensive V&FA training manual is now available in pdf format and is regularly updated. We cover volunteer expenses in travelling to and from farms, and this is incorporated into a wider Society initiative to estimate and reduce carbon emissions from transport – see the RSPB's 'Field of View' agricultural newsletters at http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/vandfa/index.asp.

Latest results

In 2007, the 400th farm survey was carried out in Scotland. To give an idea of the extent of the V&FA project's engagement with the farming community, this represents approximately one in every 50 farms in Scotland - a tremendous achievement and a great credit to the time and skills provided by volunteers. The 400 surveys represent approximately 8,000 volunteer hours from a core of over 200 active volunteers – which is more than four full time staff equivalents!

Over 130 bird species have been recorded with the majority being reasonably familiar species, although a few scarcer species have been recorded. The survey method is a reduced form of the old Common Bird Census. Volunteers, working either alone or in pairs, walk the field boundaries and record the birds they see and hear using BTO species and activity codes. Instead of carrying out ten breeding season visits, we are happy that three or four visits are sufficient to provide an accurate guide to the bird species using the farm. Because of the requirement to follow field boundaries, the surveys concentrate on in-bye areas, predominantly lowland. Upland species are occasionally recorded, and finding a Black Grouse, Hen Harrier or Twite does provide a special thrill. Volunteers do not actively search for nests, although it is encouraging when such things as Tree Sparrow or Lapwing nests are noted.

Meeting farmers first-hand is essential before beginning the survey and volunteers participating in the V&FA project are ambassadors for the bird conservation movement, since this is often the first chance that a farmer may have to meet a representative of the RSPB face-to-face.

The project also provides a number of other benefits:

- the opportunity to explore a new part of the countryside
- V&FA volunteers have discovered some of the last Corn Buntings in the south of Scotland
- developing identification skills
- an appreciation of the relationship between land use and birds and other wildlife
- social gatherings at spring training events and the autumn 'thank you' events are well attended and are great informal opportunities to meet other volunteers, farmers, and RSPB staff.

At least one enterprising and enthusiastic volunteer has returned to a number of farms to erect Barn Owl nest boxes that are then monitored in subsequent years.

Last autumn, farmers, volunteers and RSPB staff were joined by SNP and Liberal Democrat MSPs and afterwards, an unsolicited motion [S3M-948] commending the project was subsequently lodged at the Scottish Parliament in November and received cross-party support - another milestone for the V&FA project in Scotland.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the 400 surveys. Slightly more (222) have been carried out in the RSPB South & West region, as the project was launched here first, followed in 2003 by East Scotland. The project is not widely available in North Scotland (effectively Highland), nor the islands, primarily due to logistical difficulties.

With over 20,000 farmers in Scotland, there is scope for a great deal of wildlife management, especially where government funds can be sourced. Such sympathetic land management would in part offset the expected loss of large amounts of land previously managed as set-aside. The concerns about falling Lapwing and Curlew numbers in Scotland are justifiable (47% and 52% respectively since 1994 (BTO Breeding Bird Survey figures) as the populations of these familiar and evocative birds are highly significant in UK terms. The increases in some species, such as Tree Sparrows and Reed Buntings are likely to reflect the benefits of certain agri-environment prescriptions, such as wild bird cover, beetle banks and creation and management of wetland.

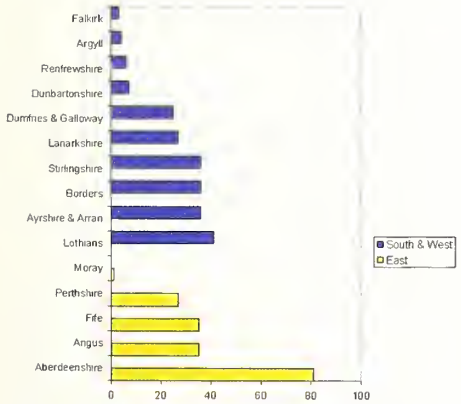


Figure 1. The distribution of farm surveys by region carried out under the RSPB Volunteer & Farmer Alliance between 2002 and 2007.

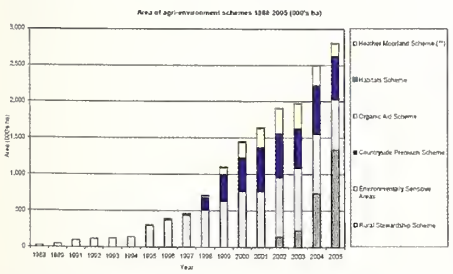


Figure 2. The cumulative land area represented by Scotland's farms that have undertaken agri-environment agreements, separated by scheme (Scottish Government website).

The area involved in agri-environment agreements on Scottish farms climbed to close to 3 million hectares in 2005 (Figure 2). However, it is crucial that appropriate prescriptions are included in the various options, and that these are suitably employed in the farming landscape. Widespread and appropriate deployment of agri-environment schemes is the most important way of helping halt and reverse the declines in the more widespread farmland birds.

A valuable step is to provide information to farmers on the birds that are present on their farm. This helps ensure that the most relevant management options are considered should a farmer then decide to apply to an agri-environment scheme.

In 2007, an average of 41 species was recorded on farms in South & West Scotland. As a good rule of thumb, about half the species recorded are on either the

Yellow Wagtail nest with chicks in potato field
Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

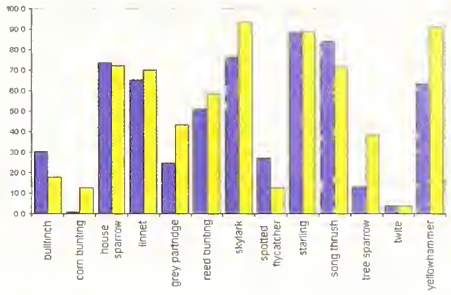


Figure 3. Distribution of Red List farmland bird species by frequency of occurrence in South & West Scotland (blue) and East Scotland (amber) respectively.

Red or Amber Lists of birds of conservation concern, and for the Red List, containing the birds of highest conservation concern, farm size isn't that important. Even a small farm may have seven or eight Red List species, which usually reflects the diversity of habitats available. It is known that farms with a mixed arable and livestock system tend to have higher species diversity, and this probably goes for other wildlife, not just birds. For the rarer species, it is satisfying to see that in East Scotland, where the majority of Scotland's mainland Corn Buntings are found, this species is regularly recorded in small numbers. A very few farms in the South-east of Scotland have recorded Yellow Wagtails.

Figure 3 shows the frequency of occurrence on farms of the most commonly recorded Red List species, with some apparent differences between the

Corn Bunting *Tom Marshall (rspb-images.com)*

Tree Pipit *Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)*

regions. The higher apparent proportion of seed-eating species such Corn Bunting, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer reflects the large proportion of farms in East Scotland surveyed in Aberdeenshire in areas dominated by arable land. A higher proportion of Bullfinch, Spotted Flycatcher and to a lesser extent Song Thrush in South & West Scotland may reflect the presence of more wooded areas. Other Red List species include Black Grouse, Hen Harrier and Quail. Of the Amber List species, the waders are of the greatest interest, with Lapwing and Curlew still recorded on about two-thirds of farms but Redshank are exceptionally scarce. It is also clear, despite the survey method not lending itself to woodlands, that farm woodlands support a number of migratory bird species such as Tree Pipit and Wood Warbler that are undergoing continuing declines.

The V&FA complements Atlas survey work

The Atlas is going to keep many of us busy over the next few winters and summers, and the method used for the Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) is not really compatible with the CBC-style individual farm approach of the V&FA project. However, I like to think that the two surveys, plus the Breeding Bird Survey, provide a valuable trio of surveys that complement one another. The key aspect of the Volunteer & Farmer Alliance is that it provides a personalised, individual farm survey, with the resulting laminated map of the results being of direct benefit to farmers in showing them which birds are where on the farm. The farmer has the option to use this information to inform their land management practices and decisions that may benefit farmland birds, without disrupting the existing farming system.

The new Rural Development Contracts, to be launched soon, represent the most recent agri-environment package, together with social and economic options. We do not know yet what the uptake for the new schemes will be but we hope that the V&FA will encourage suitable applications. One scheme, the Land Managers' Options, is open to all and available funding is based on the size of the farm. A higher-level management tier, Rural Priorities, in effect replaces the previous Rural Stewardship Scheme. This will be competitive and should involve applications for more extensive agri-environment work. We hope that the information provided by the V&FA surveys can help indicate the presence of regional priority species and the extra information we provide can guide the choice of a suite of options to benefit these species.

How you can be involved

In the course of your Atlas work, you may well come across farmers who may be interested in receiving a personalised survey map through the V&FA project. For example, there may be a particular farm with an abundance of interesting birds. Alternatively, you may know an interested farmer outside of your Atlas work, and perhaps they would be interested in a survey more focussed on their farm, or part of it.

You may wish to mention the project if you feel they may be interested, for example if writing to report a summary of the birds seen on your winter and summer visits. If you wanted to take on the survey yourself, that would be great. However, it is probably easier to do the V&FA survey in a different year to the Atlas TTVs, unless you honestly feel that you have the time to both, plus any other commitments.

If you would like to know more about the project, please don't hesitate to get in touch by phone or email.

Bob Dawson

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or ***Bob Dawson*** *(South & West)*
Tel. 0141 331 0993,
E-mail: bob.dawson@rspb.org.uk.

Hotting up at Hogganfield

A Coot spat *Lang Stewart*

Passions and tempers are definitely rising in the waterfowl world now in mid-February. Even a short visit to Hogganfield Loch at Stepps in Glasgow's suburbs gives plenty of opportunity to watch spectacular displays of aggression and lust, often at unusually close range. Most birds are there for the food handouts and are used to people crowding at the loch edges, so Lang Stewart with camera was able to capture some of this action without raising any avian eyebrows. He writes.....

I regularly pop in to the lochside at Hogganfield. As you stand in the carpark, the sun shines from directly behind giving perfect light on your subjects. There are four species that are a special delight to watch. Firstly the female Goosander lying prone and semi-submerged in the water as the male swims a circle around her prior to mating. When mounting takes place, the female is totally submerged under the male.

Mating Goosanders *Lang Stewart*

Coots on the other hand show signs of affection to each other with the birds mantling and posturing aggressively. This inevitably leads to regular fights, some of which can be serious and last for several minutes. The main weapons used are the huge spatulate feet – lots of action for the photographer with these ruby–red eyes gleaming amidst all the splashing!.

A bit of necking *Lang Stewart*

The mating *Lang Stewart*

The Heart *Lang Stewart*

Mute Swan courting pairs are very graceful and gentle as they glide around the loch, head-turning and neck-twining with choreographed movements leading to quite an aggressive mating - the female almost completely underwater with the male's weight. The male holds her neck with his beak during the pairing. Afterwards they return to gentler movements with their necks forming the iconic pose of the 'heart' shape - pure romance!

The Display *Lang Stewart*

At full tilt *Lang Stewart*

But the most entertaining is the Don Juan of the loch – the male Goldeneye. This is a hugely captivating display with 'sky-pointing', 'water-flicking' with the feet sending water spraying into the air as the male folds his body in half. At other times he half-flies, half-dances across the water chasing other males and generally scattering everything in his path. It is a tour de force and a photographer's joy as this little duck carries out his amusing antics – one of the sights of the birding world!

So head to Hogganfield Loch on the next sunny day. Bring your family cameras, your DSLRs or even your mobile phones, or just stand and enjoy the amazing spectacle at this time of year.

Lang Stewart

Mapping Scotland's birds: The 2007-2011 Bird Atlas project

Stonechat *Derek Belsey*

As I write this at the turn of the year we have just completed the first winter phase of the 2007-11 Bird Atlas project and what a start it has been.

The winter work – an update

To date we know that at least 2500 tetrads in Scotland have already had their first winter visit. These are the ones where the data has been submitted online by early January. The exact figure will be much higher than this as many folk may wait till they have completed their second winter visit before submitting the data either online via the www.birdatlas.net website or on paper. Coverage has been very good throughout Scotland, not only in areas like Lothian and Borders, where there are lots of volunteers and local atlases are being organised, but also in some of the remoter parts of Scotland like Dumfries, Skye, Sutherland and many parts of Inverness-shire. As usual, some of the really remote areas of Argyll and Ross-shire still show a lot of gaps. Exact details of coverage can be seen if you logon to www.birdatlas.net and choose **latest results** from the top menu bar. Click on **Covered Tetrads** to see the national map of coverage, or on **headlines** where you can use the drop down menu in the box on the right hand side to choose your region and see what coverage is like. Also worth looking at are the sample species maps and the 'Bird of the Day'.

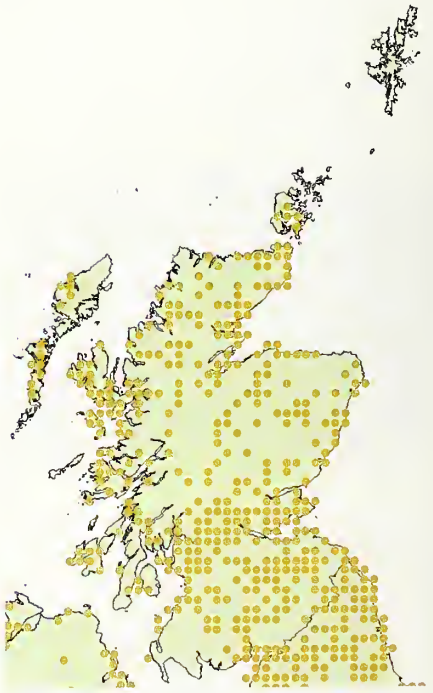
I have been lucky enough to have been involved with winter atlas fieldwork in the north of Scotland, particularly in Sutherland. It certainly changes some of your perceptions of the area when you actually get out there and start tramping through remote tetrads. Lots of surprises are in store. Woodcock for instance are everywhere. I never realised what a huge wintering population we had, I've come across them in so many places, even right out on the open hill, and just think how many I've missed. Barn Owls were once a very scarce species in the north; now virtually every ruined croft house I check in a remote strath or glen contains a Barn Owl. A lot of the overgrazed moors are fairly devoid of birds and I have had a few nil counts from such tetrads. Here and there, however, I come across the occasional Red Grouse, a wintering Meadow Pipit or a pair of Stonechats. Finally the dreaded dense sitka spruce plantations contain lots of Coal Tits and Goldcrest as you would expect, but the phenomenal cone crop this winter means they are also full of Crossbills and Siskins.

We are certainly going to see some very big changes when we compare the 2007-11 winter atlas maps with the original 1981-84 ones.

The breeding season work

By the time you are reading this the first year of the winter atlas will have been completed and we will be getting prepared for the start of the breeding atlas on1st April 2008. This will cover four months from April to July. As with the winter work we need at least 8 Timed Tetrad Visits in each 10-km square as well as Roving Records to build up complete species lists for each square. Two TTVs will be required per tetrad, one in the early summer (Apr-May) and the other late summer (Jun-July). It is probably a good idea to try and plan it so that if you do an April early visit that your late visit is in June. If you did a May visit the follow up could be in either June or July. The main thing is to try and get one visit when all the summer migrants are in and are actively nesting. Also remember that once you have given a tetrad its set of two summer visits it does not need to be covered again during the atlas period for TTVs, so the following summer you can choose new tetrads to survey.

Finding all the breeding species in a 10-km square will be quite a challenge. It will be important to try and visit all the key habitats at least a couple of times. A particular problem will be nocturnal species such as owls and Woodcock. At least one dusk/evening visit is recommended for each 10-km square to target these species.



Distribution of Stonechat, New Winter Atlas: Nov 07-Jan 08. Note large numbers wintering inland compared to 1981-4 winter atlas.

Breeding evidence

An additional feature of the breeding atlas is to gather information on breeding status for all species in a 10-km square. There are three categories of breeding evidence: possible, probable and confirmed. The more species we can get in the latter category the better. Finding nests to prove breeding may be very easy for some species such as Rooks or Kittiwakes but not so easy for Grasshopper Warblers! There are, however, many ways of confirming breeding without finding a nest (see codes in box 1). One of the easiest ones is FF, birds carrying food or faecal sacs. Think how often you see thrushes, pipits or warblers with beaks full of grubs and insects in summer. These birds are obviously feeding chicks, so this can be used to confirm breeding. Another useful code is FL. This stands for recently fledged young. Chicks are often very noisy once they have fledged, constantly calling for food. This makes it easy spot them and prove breeding. In fact for some difficult species, such as owls, hearing the chicks contact or hunger calls is often the only way we know the birds are there. For a range of species, particularly ducks and waders, DD can be used to indicate distraction displays.

If you cannot confirm breeding, the next best thing is to get evidence of probable breeding. When you approach a nest or a fledged youngster the adults often get very agitated. In woods, Redstarts will give their distinctive loud 'hwee-tucc-tucc', Wood Warblers their plaintive 'pyoo', whilst out on the moors the Golden Plover's constantly repeated 'tlu-i' is a sure sign there is probably a nest or chicks nearby. Here the code A – agitated, is very useful to suggest probable breeding. Similarly territorial behaviour such as a bird singing in the same area for a week or more can be coded as T, or a pair together in suitable habitat as P. N can be used to signify birds visiting probable nest sites, such as Swifts flying in under eaves or Black Guillemots disappearing into a crack on a cliff. Early in the season, birds carry nest material can be coded as B. Failing this, we may just have to classify the sightings as possibly breeding. This would include sightings such as a singing male (S) or birds in suitable habitat (H).

Finally there are two other useful categories that come under the non-breeding heading. Throughout April and May it is possible that falls of migrants such as Pied Flycatchers, Redstarts and Bluethroats could occur along the east coast, these should be coded as M for migrants. The other group are late-departing winter visitors such as flocks of Redwings, Fieldfares, waders or geese. These should be coded as U. This can also be used for summering non-breeders such as young Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit or pricked geese that have not made the journey back north.

Global climatic change is another important factor currently influencing bird distributions, with many species spreading further and further north. It will be fascinating to see how far species like Hobby, Nuthatch and Reed Warbler have reached in Scotland by 2011. How are our montane specialists such as Dotterel, Ptarmigan and Snow Bunting faring? Will they be disappearing from our hill tops or as Adam Watson has suggested, benefiting from the more exposed conditions that north-west Scotland will be experiencing, so maybe actually increasing in range? Time will tell.

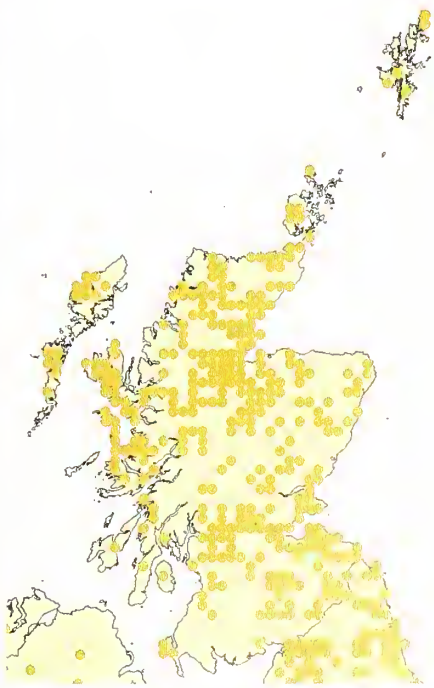
Getting involved

Hopefully if you have participated during the winter period of atlas work you will continue to help out during this and the coming summers. If you have not got involved yet, it is not too late to start. Log onto the atlas website www.birdatlas.net and either request a tetrad to survey or start submitting Roving Records. Remember each 10-km square is going to need a new species list covering the breeding season, so all records are valuable. Once you have reported a species for a square in summer, there is no need to give repeat sightings of that species in that square. The only exception is if you can up its breeding category, from say **S** on its first sighting to **FY** on its next sighting.

This important project has got off to a flying start. Atlasing is fun. It gets you out into new areas, seeing new birds and gives purpose to your birding. The results from this work will be used by conservationists for years to come. Make sure that you do indeed get involved in this exciting project. For further details check the website, e-mail me at bob.swann@bto.org or phone 07919378876.

Bob Swann
Scottish Organiser Bird Atlas 2007-11.

Woodcock *Tommy Holden*



Distribution of Woodcock, New Winter Atlas: Nov 07-Jan 08. Note widespread distribution.

Scottish Recorders' Conference - January 26th 2008

Recorders' round-up *Dave Allan*

Waterston House played host to the most recent gathering of the Scottish Bird Recorders network. The aim of the meeting is to bring together local recorders from across the Scottish network to discuss current topics in the bird recording world. Financial support for the meeting is provided by SOC and SNH.

This year a total of 13 recorders/assistant recorders and seven assorted other folk were able to attend the meeting. The recorders' time and effort is much appreciated as all their work is done on a voluntary basis, and there seem to be ever more weekend conferences and meetings these days. Particular thanks to far-travelled recorders go to Jim Williams (Orkney), Al McNee and Dave Butterfield (Highland), Martin Cook (Moray & Nairn) and Tom Callan (representing Argyll). A special welcome was extended to the new recorders present at the meeting for the first time – Hywel Maggs (NE Scotland) and John Ogilvie (Angus & Dundee).

Those who lingered long enough after the meeting to end up in the rogue's gallery included - Left to right: Chris Waltho (SOC), Iain English (Isle of May), Jim Williams (Orkney), Martin Cook (Moray & Nairn), Dave Butterfield (Highland), Clive McKay (SOC), Alan Wood (Clyde), Angus Hogg (*Scottish Birds* Records Committee), Mark Holling (Rare Breeding Birds Panel), Ray Murray (Borders), Al McNee (Highland), Tom Callan (Argyll), Ian Andrews (*The Birds of Scotland*), Iain Gibson (Clyde).

Data ownership and data exchange

A dry subject indeed, but one where we all need to know where we stand, especially as electronic transfer of data becomes easier. This topic was the first one addressed at the meeting to ensure that we were all awake. The question of who owns the bird records that we submit to our local recorder, and what the recorders subsequently do with the records as appointed 'custodian' is one which occurs ever more frequently. Fortunately, Oliver Grafton of English Nature and the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) came to the meeting to guide us through this minefield. In fact, it's not such a complex subject after all. The NBN have identified seven 'Data Exchange Principles' to act as guidelines for those involved in exchanging biodiversity data. These are mostly common sense, and were adopted without reservation by the recorders at the meeting as agreed guidelines on the ways in which we will manage bird information on your behalf. The seven principles are outlined in the box below. They provide guidance for all of us – as data owners (observers) and/or data managers/suppliers (local recorders). In essence, recorders are agreeing to act responsibly with your data, to protect your individual rights, to manage sensitive data appropriately, and to supply the data at minimum cost to not-for-profit organisations, and at 'reasonable' cost for commercial use. Nothing new there then really – but now it's written down in black and white and we can all refer to it. Full details will be available soon under the Bird Recording in Scotland section of the SOC web-site at http://www.the-soc.org.uk/index.htm

The Seven Data Exchange Principles adopted by SOC

[text in square brackets = my attempts at jargon busting]

Principle One

Biodiversity data should be easily accessible to enable their use for decision-making, education, research and other public-benefit purposes.

Principle Two

Making biodiversity data available should reduce the risk of damage to the environment. If it is likely to have the opposite effect, availability may need to be controlled [*i.e. sensitive data should be managed appropriately*].

Principle Three

Biodiversity data suppliers [*e.g. local recorders*] should make available sufficient meta-data [*information describing the data they hold*] to allow biodiversity data users to assess the scope and potential uses of their information holdings. When biodiversity data are supplied, accompanying information (meta-data) on its ownership, methods and scale of collection and limitations of interpretation, should be provided.

Principle Four

A clear transfer of authority should be made when a biodiversity data resource is put together, to allow biodiversity data managers [*local recorders*] to act on behalf of the biodiversity data owners [*observers*].

Principle Five

Managers of biodiversity data [*local recorders, SOC, local records centres*] should make their framework of terms and conditions publicly available, allowing biodiversity data owners [*observers*] to have confidence that control will be exercised in the management and use of their data.

Principle Six

Personal data must be managed in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and/or any subsequent legal provisions.

Principle Seven

a) Managers and funders of biodiversity data should make basic facts freely available (except for handling charges if needed) for not-for-profit decision-making, education, research and other public-benefit purposes.

b) Biodiversity data suppliers should try to arrange resourcing of information provision so that charges for not-for-profit uses are minimal and charges for commercial uses are realistic but do not prevent the use of biodiversity data.

c) Biodiversity data users should expect to contribute to sustaining the provision of biodiversity data through contributing either in kind or financially to the collection, collation and management of biodiversity data, or at the point of use.

Coming your way soon...

NEW! SOC bird recording software

I am currently developing a new style for the SOC recording spreadsheet first developed by Mark Holling and Ray Murray. This software will only be successful if it is is widely adopted across the country but I am hopeful that its ease of use will make it popular with all observers - All you need to run the software is MS Excel 95 or later. Your feedback during the development process will be invaluable. If you are interested in road-testing the new software, please contact me at clive.mckay@the-soc.org.uk.

The key to getting the new software functional lies in the development of site gazetteers for each recording area that can be automatically 'looked up' at the click of a button. This saves valuable time and keystrokes, ensures accuracy of place names and also enables the grid reference to be looked up automatically. The need to update site lists leads inevitably towards an on-line recording system where observers can add new sites to the gazetteer which, after validation, then become almost immediately available to the rest of the birding community.

This software will only be successful if it is is widely adopted across the country. I am hopeful that its ease of use will make it popular with all observers. We are currently looking at the many tools that we can incorporate into an on-line version of the software to assist with mapping and graphing your records, creating lists, sharing records, automatically sending e-mails of interesting records to newsgroups and recorders etc. Your feed back during the development process will be invaluable. If you are interested in road-testing the new software, please contact me at clive.mckay@the-soc.org.uk.

New local avifauna series for Scotland?

Not one to rest on his laurels, Ron Forrester updated us on proposals for the production of a new set of local avifaunas for Scotland, something along the lines of those produced by Harvie-Brown & Buckley in the late 1800s. The aim would be for an avifauna to be produced for each recording area, each sharing similar style and formatting, so that they would build into a collectable series. Ron envisages that over the next 10-15 years it might be possible to produce 1-2 local avifaunas annually. One problem is the initial capital outlay required for production and printing costs. It is hoped that a publications fund will be set up based on income generated by *The Birds of Scotland* to overcome this hurdle. Ron will shortly be sending out a questionnaire to Local recorders and potential authors to see what level of enthusiasm there is for such a project.

Rare Birds

Mark Holling, secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel provided an update on the recent work of the panel. The RBBP website has been greatly improved recently by Ian Andrews (see http://www.rbbp.org.uk/). Mark has been busy producing the 2005 report, and hopes that he will have all records for 2006 by April 2008 – please! Four species have been moved from the RBBP list – Barn Owl, Kingfisher, Crested Tit and Common Crossbill. However, three new species have been added – Shoveler, Water Rail and Hawfinch. If you haven't already done so, please ensure that any breeding records that you have for these species are submitted to your local recorder who will forward them to Mark.

Angus Hogg gave us an insight into his work as secretary of the Scottish Rare Birds Committee –evaluating field descriptions of rarities on the SBRC list (see the SBRC page on the SOC web-site http://www.the-soc.org.uk/index.htm). Records submission is now all electronic, and this has helped to improve the turnaround time for batches of records considered by the committee to 9-10 weeks. Over 80% of submitted descriptions are accepted. If one of yours isn't, remember, you can always re-submit if you feel the record merits reconsideration.

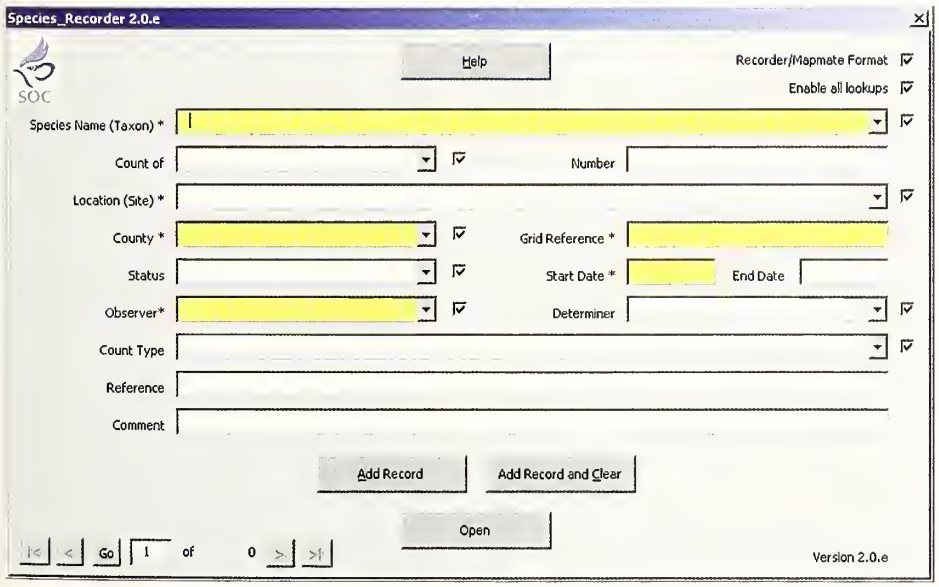
The *Scottish Bird Report*

Anyone remember this? If you've been missing the annual thump of *SBR* arriving through your letterbox, don't worry. Ray Murray has exciting new plans for a new format *SBR*. Not surprisingly, this involves going digital. In this case, the idea is to take ALL the local bird reports a year or two after production, scan them into pdf format, and produce a single searchable document for all the bird reports in Scotland. Graphs and tables (following the format of those already produced for *BS3*) can be easily updated on an annual basis. The whole package becomes a searchable archive that can be stored on the SOC web-site, or sent out as a CD. It will be possible to search by species, area, year – no longer requiring all that leafing through back issues of local and national bird reports. What a boon such a resource would have been to the authors of the *BS3* species accounts.

Summary

The meeting showed how vibrant bird recording is in Scotland, and how we are inevitably moving into the digital era, Many doors are now opening, and we are keen to ensure that these opportunities will be to the benefit of the Scottish birding community.

Clive McKay
Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator, SOC
clive.mckay@the-soc.org.uk



Species recorder interface

NOTES & COMMENT

Ringing at Hogganfield

Following on from the article on Hogganfield Loch in this edition, our first photo below shows Bernie Zonfrillo at the edge of the loch, complete with net, looking particularly innocent, but extremely alert to any ringing opportunity as Tufted Duck regularly swam under the swans after crumbs. He comments - "Clyde Ringing Group have ringed over 170 Tufted Ducks, most of them hand-caught. One bird ringed as an adult in the winter of 1999 was recovered in June 2002 in Iceland where it was found dead. Other Lanarkshire birds have been recovered subsequently in Denmark and a thousand miles away in north Norway in May, showing where they probably originate and that ducks in city parks are far from permanently resident."

Hayley with the duck *B. Zonfrillo*

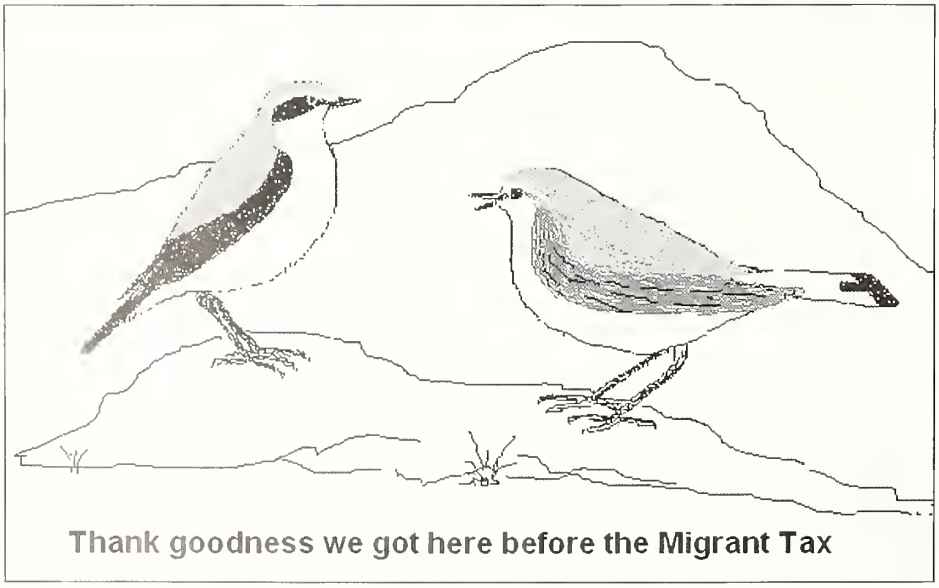
What are these two up to? *Jimmy Maxwell*

As you can see, one male Tuftie was later captured, duly processed and held by Hayley long enough to be photographed before release.

Jimmy Maxwell

Shovelers feeding behaviour

The photo below shows a pair of Shovelers at Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve, Motherwell, feeding head-to-head as they circle together. Mostly the heads are underwater as they catch items drawn up from below by the circular movement. Shovelers have previously been recorded creating a vortex effect by spinning on the surface and indeed this female did some spinning on her own as well. The pair's circular movement was executed in both directions and continued for over half an hour and was witnessed several times weeks apart. Water levels in the Haugh were much higher than normal when this feeding style occurred.



Shoveler pair circle-feeding *Jimmy Maxwell*

Pipefish are difficult

This digi-scope shot of a juv. Herring Gull (below) was taken at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist on 30th August 2007. Numerous large gulls feed just offshore at this time of year seemingly mainly on pipefish. Almost every gull appears to have some temporary difficulty in dealing with this prey, which almost invariably manages to coil itself around it's captor's neck or bill at some stage during the encounter. The gulls eventually manage to swallow the pipefish, though it may take some time.

John Kemp

Herring Gull with Pipefish *John Kemp*

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the bird picture below and have a chance of winning an SOC item. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 88. Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell @virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

Ducks *Stewart Love*

The winning Caption from *SBN* 86 (see photo below) came from John Todd with – "I think I may have overdone the make-up a tad, but I'm a game old bird" Well done! Other runner-ups were "Does my beak look big in this?" – Lang Stewart. "Know the face, but!!!!!!" – Morag Maxwell

Red-legged Partridge *Eric McCabe*

Mute Swans *Jimmy Maxwell*

Ornithological Folklore 4. The Mute Swan

CYGNUS OLOR, the Mute Swan, is certainly not vocal in the sense that Bewick's and Whooper Swans are. We occasionally hear the Mute Swan hiss if we trespass too close to a nest, although we are probably more familiar with the noise made by Mute Swans in flight-'the bell-beat of their wings' [W.B.Yeats The Lake of Innisfree]. So the question must be asked, why has the phrase 'swan-song' entered into our vocabulary? The phrase is associated with departure, but why the swan, which certainly does not sing?!

The answer lies in Greek legend, but probably having its roots in Celtic and Gaelic folklore. Zeus, married to Hera, was deeply in love with Leto [Leda]. The affair led to pregnancy ['plus ca change'!] and Leto has to look for a safe haven - Hera was on the warpath - to give birth. The island she chose was Delos, and there Apollo and Artemis, the heavenly twins, were born. The birth was celebrated, according to the poet Callimachus thus:

'The swans...circled around Delos and sang over the bed of childbirth; swans, the most musical of all the birds that fly'.

These swans were celebrating birth, the beginning, but swansong implies endings. Chaucer, Shakespeare and Coleridge use the word as we do:

'The lalous swan, ayens his deth
that singeth'.

Chaucer, Minor Poems.

I will play the swan,
And die in music.

Shakespeare, Othello Act 5. Scene 2.

Swans sing before they die-'twere
no bad thing

Did certain persons die before
they sing.

Coleridge,
Epigram on a volunteer singer.

Back to the Greeks*. Aristotle noted that swans flew out to sea as death approached. Further references to swans and death appear in Plato, Euripides, Cicero and Aesop. Thus arose the belief that swans sing only once, just before dying - hence 'swansong'. It must be said that Celtic and Gaelic legends are rife with tales of swan maidens, in which virgins are turned into swans after death.

Michael Thomas

*One Greek, Pliny the Elder, in his Natural History AD 77. wrote 'observation shows that the story that the dying swan sings is false'. Three cheers for observation.

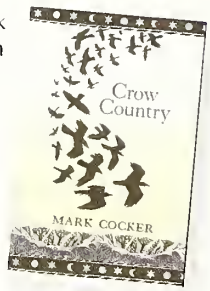
BOOK REVIEWS

The Clements Checklist of the Birds of the World: Sixth Edition. J.F.Clements, 2007. Christopher Helm. ISBN 978-0-7136-8695-1 Hardback, £40. 843 pages.

This completely revised edition is current as of 1st January 2007 and recognises 9,930 species of birds. Following the death of the author in 2005, this edition was completed by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and maintains the high standards we have come to expect from this work. The preface refers to an electronic update, available now, which will include a comprehensive list of species having different common names in Clements and International Ornithological Congress lists. An essential tool for the world lister.

David Clugston

Crow Country. Mark Cocker. 2007. Jonathan Cape, London. ISBN: 9780224076012 Hardback £16.99



This is an account of the author's six years of following corvids, mainly Rooks and Jackdaws, around the UK, with brief excursions to mainland Europe. His main area of observation has been around his home in the southern part of the Norfolk Broads between Norwich and Great Yarmouth and close to the River Yare. It is a land of extreme flatness with big skies that in winter can be filled with Rooks and Jackdaws either going to a roost at dusk or leaving it at dawn. Mark Cocker's largest roost had 40,000 birds at its peak in January 2005.

Mark Cocker contributes regularly to the Guardian and the Times Literary Supplement and has written several books including *Birds Britannica* (with Richard Mabey). His writing is stylish and the book is always a pleasant read. It does not attempt to be a monograph on Rooks, rather it is an account of the experiences of an enthusiast and will be most appreciated by other wildlife enthusiasts. Nevertheless there is a tremendous amount of information here and any 'corvophile' will want to have this book in his/her collection. Cocker has a wonderful way of putting into words the sensations, conscious or sub-conscious, that we feel whenever we set out with our binoculars on a walk.

I imagine that a decision was made by the publishers not to provide illustrations beyond a minimalist map of the River Yare valley and rather to rely on the pictures created in the reader's mind by the text. This works well enough for this reviewer who has spent many days sailing the Broads rivers - however I think that a few photographs could have given a sense of the magic of the place. An index would also have been useful.

Graham Pyatt

***Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 12:* Pithacartes to Tits and Chickadees.** Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott & David Christie, 2007. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. ISBN 84-96553-42-6. 816pp. £205.

I have to confess that I come to this series very late in the day, having not really looked at any of the previous volumes in any detail. This volume covers 15 families, mostly confined to Africa, Asia and Australasia, and describes 623 species. Each family is covered comprehensively under 10 headings followed by short species texts. There are 56 colour plates supported by 436 stunning colour photographs. Only the tit family was familiar to me. Many birders will have realized that taxonomic changes have recently been made to all our species, and this is the place to read why!

As a set of reference books of the whole world, this series is unsurpassed and difficult to fault. A massive undertaking and well up-to-date, it encompasses every aspect of behaviour and ecology. As has been pointed out in previous reviews, it might be worth purchasing if you are a world birder, otherwise the Waterston Library is the place to browse.

Norman Elkins

Lapland: A Natural History. Derek Ratcliffe. 2005. T & AD Poyser, London. ISBN 0-7136-6529-7. Hardback, 342 pages, 253 colour photographs, £40.00

This book is the first up-to-date account in English of the wildlife of Lapland for many years. Lapland is generally taken to mean the land occupied by the Lapps, more properly known as the Saami people. It covers not only northern Norway, Sweden and Finland, countries often written about individually and often in their own languages, but also Russian Lapland as far east as the Kola Peninsula and the White Sea.

Initial chapters describe the country, its vegetation, geology, climate and human influences, its historical and modern naturalists and their work, and finally the biogeography of the region. Chapter 4 is an introduction to the ecology of Lapland birds and it soon becomes clear that birds are the author's main interest – indeed, he admits as much in the preface.

The next six chapters are detailed descriptions of the main habitat types: boreal forests, forest peatlands, lakes and rivers, coastlands, tundra and finally modified and man-made habitats. Each describes the habitat and vegetation before giving a detailed account of the birds. The last two chapters cover Other Wildlife – mammals, reptiles and amphibians, butterflies, dragonflies – and Wildlife Conservation, including a list of national parks and other nature reserves by country.

The book concludes with two appendices, on Breeding birds of Lapland and Wader breeding systems. Finally there is a comprehensive eight-page list of References. The whole work is copiously illustrated throughout with a wonderfully evocative selection of colour photographs of the wildlife and habitats which really bring the region to life.

This is a superb book, which I have no hesitation in recommending. Whether you are intending to visit the area or simply wish to gain an in-depth view of the natural history of this fascinating area of northern Europe, this is the book for you. Sadly Dr Ratcliffe did not live to see it published; he died shortly after receiving the proofs. However, it stands as a fitting memorial to a man who, amongst all his other interests, clearly loved Lapland.

Paul Speak

The Birds of Lundy. Tim Davis and Tim Jones. 2007. Harpers Mill Publishing, Berrynarbor, Devon (for Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society and Lundy Field Society), 319 pages. Paperback, ISBN-10: 0-954-0088-7-1, ISBN-13: 978-0-954-0088-7-1, £18.95 www.birdsoflundy.org.uk

As well as being important for seabirds, the 3.5-mile long Lundy Island rivals Fair Isle and the Isles of Scilly as one of *the* places for watching spring and autumn migrants in Britain. Although situated 10 miles off the North Devon coast, and so well away from SOC home territory, from personal experience I can recommend a visit to Lundy to SOC members. It is a charming place, with plenty of good accommodation and, even better, a pub.

I can also recommend this excellent and comprehensive book, which is well illustrated with photographs and more than 100 line drawings by Mike Langman. The brief opening chapters provide background and context. A description of the island and its history of human habitation and land use, which has produced a wide variety of suitable habitats, is followed by a history of ornithology and conservation there (including apparently successful rat eradication in 2002-04). Regular bird-ringing began in 1947 following formation of the Lundy Field Society in 1946, and establishment of an 'observatory'. There are also some suggested walks for birdwatching day-trippers.

The bulk of the book consists of detailed accounts of all 317 species on the Lundy list. Of these, the vast majority are "vagrants" or "rare", 65 (21%) are "common" or "regular", and 39 (12%) are regular breeders. In the past, Lundy was famed for both its Puffins (in Old Norse, "lundi" apparently means puffin and "ey" means island) and its Peregrines, which were highly prized for falconry. Although the former is now "teetering on the verge of extinction on the island", it is hoped that it and the other regular burrow nester, Manx Shearwater, will respond well to the recent rat eradication. Peregrines, on the other hand, are doing much better, having gone from 1 or 2 pairs breeding annually until 1990 to 6 territory-holding pairs in 2002. Lesser Black-backed Gulls have also increased markedly in recent years, whereas other seabirds, and Lapwings, have shown major declines.

One aspect I found of particular interest was what could be gleaned

from the ringing data (numbers of ringed birds, controls and/or recoveries) provided in species accounts. There is also a summary list at the end of the book of totals in each of the 172 species represented in the 85,741 birds ringed on Lundy from 1947-2006. Apart from information about ringed birds' movements, what fascinated me (as a non-ringer) was the huge variation among species in "percentage returns". These ranged from an amazing 28% of (nestling) Cormorants, and 3% of Manx Shearwaters, to a fraction of 1%, or zero, for just about everything else. Ages which some species can attain, based on ringing evidence, also surprised me, especially smaller species like Blackbird (>8 yrs), Dunnock and Robin (both >5yrs). The book ends with a comprehensive bibliography and species index.

John Savory

Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand 1999-2004 CJR Robertson, P Hyvönen, MJ Fraser & CR Pickard 2007. The Ornithological Society of New Zealand, Inc. ISBN 0 9582486 5 6 Hardback £ unknown

More than 850 mainly voluntary fieldworkers contributed to this 533 page hardback which maps the distributions of all birds recorded in New Zealand across the seasons during the five year period 1999-2004. This Atlas is based on the 10km grid like the familiar BTO/SOC/IWC national atlases of Britain and Ireland, but the aim was for observers to visit each square at least once in each season. As well as birds, a principal aim of the survey was to collect habitat data. After 38 pages of introductory text covering the background to the project and interpretation of the maps, the next 274 pages of the book contain just maps and statistics by species. Large maps cover the total distribution, with smaller maps showing seasonal and breeding distributions. Interpretation of the maps is minimal, just 2-3 lines at the bottom of the page, much of which is often a list of references, and there are no illustrations of the birds. This reduces the interest of the book to readers not familiar with New Zealand. Thus, for one introduced species with which we will all be familiar, the Blackbird *Turdus merula*, the text states "Now the most widely distributed taxon in New Zealand. The remaining gaps in the South Is. are mainly non-surveyed areas". The rest of the book, amounting to almost half its total pages, is taken up with maps and tables of analyses of habitats and biodiversity, with some short explanatory chapters. As an example, two particularly fascinating maps show the distribution of endemic taxa (quite localised but especially in north and west South Island) and of introduced taxa (almost everywhere, but fewer in western South Island). The widespread nature of the latter is incredible, and no doubt of conservation concern. But I couldn't find any discussion of this issue – this book presents the facts only. In short, this atlas contains a wealth of very valuable information which will be of most interest to those who have visited the islands or plan to do so.

Mark Holling

Birder's Pocket Logbook., Papworth Publishing July 2007. ISBN 9781906247164 £8.50 including vat and postage.

This pocket-size notebook has a hard-wearing, attractive cover with an elasticated page divider which prevents pages flapping when in use or firmly closed when not. Besides a checklist for the full British List of Birds included in its 160 pages, the logbook features useful information for birdwatchers : websites, recommended magazines / books, 100pages for field notes, a guide to counting birds, bird topography and lined pages for "additional notes" along with plain pages for sketches. A plain page opposite each lined page would have been more useful in the main body of the book especially to those who make detailed sketches. Overall, a useful pocket book.

Noreen Stabler

The Birds of the Thai-Malay Peninsula Volume 2: Passerines. David R.Wells. 2007. Christopher Helm.ISBN 978-0-7136-6534-5. Hardback. 800 pages and 55 colour plates. £65.

The companion volume was published in 1999 so devotees of south-east Asian birding will be pleased that the more identification challenging order, Passeriformes has now appeared. The lead author has acquired an unrivalled thirty years experience of the birds of this region, both as a resident and scientist.

Additional contributions by the much respected duo Philip Round and Uthai Treesucon add to its authority.

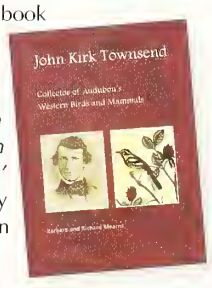
Each species account incorporates details of identification and description, status and population, habitat and ecology, voice and breeding, in addition to two colour distribution maps. The attractive and accurate colour plates are grouped at the back of the volume and were illustrated by a team of four artists.

The size of the book means that it is unlikely to be carried around but rather an invaluable source reference for the home.

David Clugston

John Kirk Townsend, Collector of Audubon's Western Birds and Mammals. Barbara and Richard Mearns (written and published), 2007. ISBN 978-0-9556739-0-0 Hardback £48,00

John Kirk Townsend was born into a Quaker family in Philadelphia in1809. He had been interested in birds from an early age and in 1834 travelled with Thomas Nuttall across America from St. Louis to the Pacific Coast and Hawaii. The core of this book is the *'Narrative of a Journey across the Rocky Mountains, to the Columbia River and a visit to the Sandwich Islands, Chili (sic) Etc'* written and published by JKT in 1839 after his return around the Horn.



The purpose of their journey was scientific, collecting specimens, *'our views were directed solely to natural history; Mr. Nuttall's to botany and mine to zoology.'*

Townsend, a skilled taxidermist, often shot more than one specimen of a species, sending the prepared skins to the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia (ANSP). Most of these were used by Audubon and others to illustrate 'The Birds of America'. Many of these specimens are still in the ANSP collection, though some were stolen by a member of staff and eventually lost. Townsend's Quaker mother 'loathed the constant killing' and commented *'he seems to have an innate propensity to go gunning for birds that cannot be conquered by advice'.*

In 1834 there were settlements, tracks etc all the way to the west coast, JKT and Nuttall travelled by foot, horse and river boat, but between settlements they had to live off the country; there was one day when they had nothing to eat until members of the party went out hunting. There were wolves which would hang around the edge of the camps looking for easy meat.

Shortened versions of 'The Narrative' had appeared previously, the complete Narrative was first published in 1999 without illustrations. This book is comprehensive, containing the Narrative, Audubon's illustrations alongside photographs of skins of the same birds and of locations along the route. At the beginning of each chapter there are sketch maps of the route taken with colour-coded notes of species found (green for previously known, red for unknown) with a time line at the bottom of each sketch map.

Though most of the birds collected by JKT were already known and had English names, JKT certainly added to the scientific descriptions of many birds, and he and Audubon also added to the list of Types.

This book is very comprehensive, meticulously written and researched with extensive editorial notes, comments from JKT's journals, and letters to his family. It also includes a chronological table of events during his life and a bibliography of unpublished and published sources with 18 appendixes covering different aspects of the collections.

Harriet Trevelyan

Where to watch birds in the West Midlands **:** (Herefordshire, Staffordshire, the former West Midlands County, Warwickshire, Worcestershire & Shropshire.) Harrison, G et al. 2007. Helm, ISBN 978-07136-6419-5. Paperback. £16.99. Third edition.

This incorporates the changes (described in the useful Introduction) in the West Midlands avifauna since the second edition.

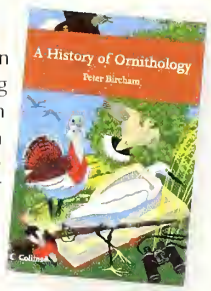
Guidance on using the book and an informative portrait of the six counties precede the detailed county site accounts. There is a map for each county showing all the sites and large-scale maps for most sites. Each account includes information on habitat and who administers it, species (primarily the more interesting

"regulars" and specialities), best times of day and year, best weather conditions for visits, travel to sites (including public transport) and access within sites. Information on further reading, relevant organisations and contacts for public transport are followed by indices for sites and for species.

Given the acknowledgement that some sites straddle or adjoin county boundaries, an overview map showing all six counties with all sites, if scale allowed, would have been helpful. Nevertheless the book will be invaluable both to local birders and those visiting the area.

Trevor Smith

A History of Ornithology (The New Naturalist Library) Peter Bircham. 2007. Harper Collins, London. 484 pages. Hardback, ISBN-10 0007199694, ISBN-13 978-0007199693, £45. Paperback, ISBN-10 0007199708, ISBN-13 978-0007199709, £25



Following the publication in 2004 of two entertaining histories of British birdwatching, by Stephen Moss (*A Bird in the Bush: a Social History of Birdwatching*) and Ian Wallace (*Beguiled by Birds*), here we have another history of British ornithology written by Peter Bircham, a tutor in ornithology at Cambridge University and author of *The Birds of Cambridgeshire*. Although this new book covers much of the same ground as the other two, it describes the early history and the more scientific aspects of ornithology in greater detail. Unlike the others, this book (deliberately) has little to say about living ornithologists and their work, and, sadly from our point of view, it has only a single page devoted specifically to Scottish ornithology. Yes, the SOC, "the good ladies", George Waterston and Maury Meiklejohn do get mentioned, and William MacGillivray is well covered elsewhere in the book, but other important Scottish contributions from the likes of Seton Gordon and Desmond Nethersole-Thompson get no recognition at all. Neither, incredibly, does David Bannerman's erudite 12-volume *The Birds of the British Isles* (which was rated highly by Ian Wallace in his book). It may be that the Cambridge author has emphasised an apparent Oxbridge bias in this book, and his reference on p.394 to "Wynne-Edwards in Edinburgh" (when I know him to have been my professor in Aberdeen) may betray a certain lack of knowledge about matters north of the border.

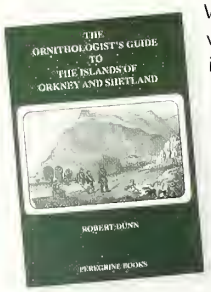
Despite such frustrations, this is still a most informative book, and a good read. Its 20 well-illustrated chapters, starting with references to Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Pliny (23-79 AD), are too many to list or summarise here. Suffice it to say that much of the book is taken up with discussion of Lists, Nomenclature and Classification, and we do not get to "Migration: the Scientific Studies Begin" (in 1880) until Chapter 14, and early "Behavioural and Ecological Studies" (before World War II) are described in Chapter 16. Chapter 19, which deals with "The British List and Problems with Fraud", examines in detail the exposure of fraudulent data in "The Hastings Rarities" and the now infamous "Meinertzhagen Affair".

The final chapter is entitled "New Slants on Old Problems", the main one being "The Great Nomenclature Controversy". This refers partly to the recent imposition of contentious new (English) bird names, which the author, like many others, does not seem to welcome. Thus, on p.425, he states "It must be said that most of these names show a lack of imagination, consisting largely of adding a prefix "northern", "common" or "Eurasian" to the familiar name. Botanists and entomologists use scientific nomenclature preferentially – why should ornithologists be different?" (I agree, and it was a revelation to me on a recent visit to Poland to discover that ornithologists in some countries do use scientific bird names almost exclusively.) The other part of the "Great Nomenclature Controversy", of course, concerns taxonomy. It used to be "trinomial" versus "binomial", and "splitters" versus "lumpers", and now species come and species go, and we still argue about what may or may not be "Britain's only endemic species"! One would imagine that modern DNA analysis might provide the way to a universally acceptable system of classification, but, on p. 427, the author suggests that for various reasons this may not be possible. A useful list of dates of the first Historical Records of all the birds on the British List is provided at the end of the book, followed by a bibliography that could probably have been more comprehensive.

John Savory

The Ornithologist's Guide to the Islands of Orkney and Shetland . Robert Dunn. 2007. Privately published by Peregrine Books, 27 Hunger Hills Avenue, Horsforth, Leeds, LS18 5JS, West Yorkshire. (Limited to 150 hard-backed copies) £30 post free.

The original 1837 edition of this book is a collector's item and rarely appears for sale, so it is good to see that a finely produced facsimile has been published. Dunn was a Yorkshire taxidermist and natural history dealer. His first extended visit to the Northern Isles was undertaken in 1831 and he made four further visits before settling in Shetland in 1842, later moving to Orkney. Robert was a leading supplier of eggs and bird skins at a period when this was the norm. Many of his collecting exploits, quite abhorrent to us today, are described in the book. However, many interesting observations can be gleaned from his writings, not only concerning birds, but also historical information and travel within the islands.



What makes this small volume even more desirable is the addition of an introduction and biographical chapter specially written by Martin Limbert of Doncaster Museum. He also located an egg of a Black-headed Gull collected by Dunn and used it as a coloured frontispiece.

David Clugston

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SC 009859).

www.the-soc.org.uk

***Passwords to access members' web pages on the SOC web site:
'tawny' & 'owl'***